POEMS

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Cover

POEMS

1916-1918

BY

FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR
Novels:
THE YOUNG PHYSICIAN
THE CRESCENT MOON
THE IRON AGE
THE DARK TOWER
DEEP SEA
UNDERGROWTH (with E. Brett Young)

Poems:
FIVE DEGREES SOUTH

Belles Lettres:
ROBERT BRIDGES: A Critical Study
MARCHING ON TANGA

TO

EDYTH GOODALL

Remember thus our sweet conspiracy:
That I, having dreamed a lovely thing, with dull
Words marred it--and you gave it back to me
A thousand, thousand times more beautiful.

ERRATA
Page 26, line 17,*for*"Lybian"*read*"Libyan."
Page 46, line 9,*for*"lythe"*read*"lithe."
Page 70, line 13,*for*"tyrranous"*read*"tyrannous."

[Transcriber's note: the above errata have been applied to this etext. The word "Lybia" was also on page 32, and was corrected as above. Similarly, "tyrranous" was also on page 86, and was corrected.]

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PROTHALAMION

When the evening came my love said to me:
Let us go into the garden now that the sky is cool,
The garden of black hellebore and rosemary,
Where wild woodruff spills in a milky pool.

Low we passed in the twilight, for the wavering heat
Of day had waned, and round that shaded plot
Of secret beauty the thickets clustered sweet:
Here is heaven, our hearts whispered, but our lips spake not.

Between that old garden and seas of lazy foam
Gloomy and beautiful alleys of trees arise
With spire of cypress and dreamy beechen dome,
So dark that our enchanted sight knew nothing but the skies

Veiled with soft air, drench'd in the roses' musk
Or the dusky, dark carnation's breath of clove;
No stars burned in their deeps, but through the dusk
I saw my love's eyes, and they were brimmed with love.

No star their secret ravished, no wasting moon
Mocked the sad transience of those eternal hours:
Only the soft, unseeing heaven of June,
The ghosts of great trees, and the sleeping flowers.

For doves that crooned in the leafy noonday now
Were silent; the night-jar sought his secret covers,
Nor even a mild sea-whisper moved a creaking bough--
Was ever a silence deeper made for lovers?

Was ever a moment meeter made for love?
Beautiful are your closed lips beneath my kiss;
And all your yielding sweetness beautiful--
Oh, never in all the world was such a night as this!

TESTAMENT

If I had died, and never seen the dawn
For which I hardly hoped, lighting this lawn
Of silvery grasses; if there had been no light,
And last night merged into perpetual night;
I doubt if I should ever have been content
To have closed my eyes without some testament
To the great benefits that marked my faring
Through the sweet world; for all my joy was sharing
And lonely pleasures were few. Unto which end
Three legacies I'll send,
Three legacies, already half possess'd:
One to a friend, of all good friends the best,
Better than which is nothing; yet another
Unto thy twin, dissimilar spirit, Brother;
The third to you,
Most beautiful, most true,
Most perfect one, to whom they all are due.

Quick, quick ... while there is time....
O best of friends, I leave you one sublime
Summer, one fadeless summer. 'Twas begun
Ere Cotswold hawthorn tarnished in the sun,
When hedges were fledged with green, and early swallows
Swift-darting, on curved wings, pillaged the fallows;
When all our vale was dappled blossom and light,
And oh, the scent of beanfields in the night!
You shall remember that rich dust at even
Which made old Evesham like a street in heaven,
Gold-paved, and washed within a wave of golden
Air all her dreamy towers and gables olden.
You shall remember
How arms sun-blistered, hot palms crack'd with rowing,
Clove the cool water of Avon, sweetly flowing;
And how our bodies, beautifully white,
Stretch'd to a long stroke lengthened in green light,
And we, emerging, laughed in childish wise,
And pressed the kissing water from our eyes.
Ah, was our laughter childish, or were we wise?
And then, crown of the day, a tired returning
With happy sunsets over Bredon burning,

With music and with moonlight, and good ale,
And no thought for the morrow.... Heavy phlox
Our garden pathways bordered, and evening stocks,
Those humble weeds, in sunlight withered and pale,
With a night scent to match the nightingale,
Gladdened with spicèd sweetness sweet night's shadows,
Meeting the breath of hay from mowing meadows:
As humble was our joy, and as intense
Our rapture. So, before I hurry hence,
Yours be the memory.
One night again,
When we were men, and had striven, and known pain,
By a dark canal debating, unresigned,
On the blind fate that shadows humankind,
On the blind sword that severs human love...
Then did the hidden belfry from above
On troubled minds in benediction shed
The patience of the great anonymous dead
Who reared those towers, those high cathedrals builded
In solemn stone, and with clear fancy gilded
A beauty beyond ours, trusting in God.
Then dared we follow the dark way they trod,
And bowing to the universal plan
Trust in the true and fiery spirit of Man.

And you, my Brother,
You know, as knows one other,
How my spirit revisiteth a room
In a high wing, beneath pine-trees, where gloom
Dwelleth, dispelled by resinous wood embers,
Where, in half-darkness ... How the heart remembers...
We talked of beauty, and those fiery things
To which the divine desirous spirit clings,
In a wing'd rapture to that heaven flinging,
Where beauty is an easy thing, and singing
The natural speech of man. Like kissing swords
Our wits clashed there; the brittle beauty of words
Breaking, seemed to discover its secret heart
And all the rapt elusiveness of Art.
Now I have known sorrow, and now I sing

That a lovely word is not an idle thing;
For as with stars the cloth of night is spangled,
With star-like words, most lovelily entangled,
The woof of sombre thought is deckt.... Ah, bright
And cold they glitter in the spirit's night!
But neither distant nor dispassionate;
For beauty is an armour against fate....
I tell you, who have stood in the dark alone.
Seeing the face that turneth all to stone,
Medusa, blind with hate,
While I was dying, Beauty sate with me
Nor tortured any longer; gracious was she;
To her soft words I listened, and was content
To die, nor sorry that my light was spent.
So, Brother, if I come not home,
Go to that little room
That my spirit revisiteth, and there,
Somewhere in the blue air, you shall discover
If that you be a lover
Nor haughtily minded, all that once half-shaped
Then fled us, and escaped:
All that I found that day,
Far, so far away.

And you, my lovely one,
What can I leave to you, who, you having left,
Am utterly bereft?
What in my store of visionary dowers
Is not already yours?
What silences, what hours
Of peace passing all understanding; days
Made lyric by your beauty and its praise;
Years neither time can tarnish, nor death mar,
Wherein you shined as steadfast as a star
In my bleak night, heedless of the cloud-wrack
Scudding in torn fleeces black
Of my dark moods, as those who rule the far
Star-haunted pleasaunces of heaven are?
So think but lightly of that afternoon
With white clouds climbing a blue sky in June

When a boy worshipped under dreaming trees,
Who touched your hand, and sought your eyes.
... Ah, cease,
Not these, not these...
Nor yet those nights when icy Brathay thundered
Under his bridges, and ghostly mountains wondered
At the white blossoming of a Christmas rose
More stainless than their snows;
Nor even of those placid days together
Mellow as early autumn's amber weather
When beech is ankleted with fire, and old
Elms wear their livery of yellow gold,
When orchards all are laden with increase,
And the quiet earth hath fruited, and knows peace
Oh, think not overmuch on those sweet years
Lest their last fruit be tears,--
Your tears, beloved, that were my utmost pain,--
But rather, dream again
How that a lover, half poet and half child,
An eager spirit of fragile fancies wild
Compact, adored the beauty and truth in you:
To your own truth be true;
And when, not mournfully, you turn this page
Consider still your starry heritage,
Continue in your loveliness, a star
To gladden me from afar
Even where there is no light
In my last night.

LOCHANILAUN

This is the image of my last content:
My soul shall be a little lonely lake,
So hidden that no shadow of man may break
The folding of its mountain battlement;

Only the beautiful and innocent
Whiteness of sea-born cloud drooping to shake
Cool rain upon the reed-beds, or the wake
Of churn'd cloud in a howling wind's descent.
For there shall be no terror in the night
When stars that I have loved are born in me,
And cloudy darkness I will hold most fair;
But this shall be the end of my delight:
That you, my lovely one, may stoop and see
Your image in the mirrored beauty there.

LETTERMORE

These winter days on Lettermore
The brown west wind it sweeps the bay,
And icy rain beats on the bare
Unhomely fields that perish there:
The stony fields of Lettermore
That drink the white Atlantic spray.

And men who starve on Lettermore,
Cursing the haggard, hungry surf,
Will souse the autumn's bruisèd grains
To light dark fires within their brains
And fight with stones on Lettermore
Or sprawl beside the smoky turf.

When spring blows over Lettermore
To bloom the ragged furze with gold,
The lovely south wind's living breath
Is laden with the smell of death:
For fever breeds on Lettermore
To waste the eyes of young and old.

A black van comes to Lettermore;

The horses stumble on the stones,
The drivers curse,--for it is hard
To cross the hills from Oughterard
And cart the sick from Lettermore:
A stinking load of rags and bones.

But you will go to Lettermore
When white sea-trout are on the run,
When purple glows between the rocks
About Lord Dudley's fishing-box
Adown the road to Lettermore,
And wide seas tarnish in the sun.

And so you'll think of Lettermore
As a lost island of the blest:
With peasant lovers in a blue
Dim dusk, with heather drench'd in dew,
And the sweet peace of Lettermore
Remote and dreaming in the West.

LAMENT

Once, I think, a finer fire
Touched my lips, and then I sang
Half the songs of my desire:
With their splendour the world rang.

And their sweetness made me free
Of those starry ways whereby
Planets make their minstrelsy
In echoing, unending sky.

So, before that spell was broken,
Song of the wind, surge of the sea,--
Beautiful passionate things unspoken

Rose like a breaking wave in me:

Rose like a wave with curled crest
That green sunlight splinters through…
But the wave broke within my breast:
And now I am a man like you.

THE LEMON-TREE

Last night, last night, a vision of you
Sweetly troubled my waking dream:
Beneath the clear Algerian blue
You stood with lifted eyes: the beam
Of a winter sun beat on the crown
Of a lemon-tree, whose delicate fruit
Like pale lamps hung airily down;
And in your gazing eyes a mute
And lovely wonder…. Have I sung
Of slender things and naught beside?
You were so beautifully young
I must have kissed you or have died.

PHTHONOS

If, in high jealousy, God made me blind
And laughed to see me stumble in the night,
Driving his many-splintered arrows of light
Into that lost dominion of my mind;
Then, knowing me still unvext and unresigned,

Stole from my ears all homely sounds that might
Temper the darkness, saying, in heaven's despite,
I had not wholly left the world behind;
So, sunless, soundless, if, to make an end,
He smote the nerves that move, the nerves that feel:
Even then, O jealous one, I would not complain
If I were spared the wealth I cannot spend,
If I were left the treasure none can steal:
The lovely words that wander through my brain.

EASTER

Adown our lane at Eastertide
Hosts of dancing bluebells lay
In pools of light: and 'Oh,' you cried,
'Look, look at them: I think that they
Are bluer than the laughing sea,'
And 'Look!' you cried, 'a piece of the sky
Has fallen down for you and me
To gaze upon and love.' … And I,
Seeing in your eyes the dancing blue
And in your heart the innocent birth
Of a pure delight, I knew, I knew
That heaven had fallen upon earth.

THE LEANING ELM

Before my window, in days of winter hoar
Huddled a mournful wood:
Smooth pillars of beech, domed chestnut, sycamore,
In stony sleep they stood:
But you, unhappy elm, the angry west
Had chosen from the rest,
Flung broken on your brothers' branches bare,
And left you leaning there
So dead that when the breath of winter cast
Wild snow upon the blast,
The other living branches, downward bowed,
Shook free their crystal shroud
And shed upon your blackened trunk beneath,
Their livery of death....

On windless nights between the beechen bars
I watched cold stars
Throb whitely in the sky, and dreamily
Wondered if any life lay locked in thee:
If still the hidden sap secretly moved,
As water in the icy winterbourne
Floweth unheard;
And half I pitied you your trance forlorn:
You could not hear, I thought, the voice of any bird,
The shadowy cries of bats in dim twilight
Or cool voices of owls crying by night....
Hunting by night under the hornèd moon:
Yet half I envied you your wintry swoon,
Till, on this morning mild, the sun, new-risen
Steals from his misty prison;

The frozen fallows glow, the black trees shaken
In a clear flood of sunlight vibrating awaken:
And lo, your ravaged bole, beyond belief
Slenderly fledged anew with tender leaf
As pale as those twin vanes that break at last
In a tiny fan above the black beech-mast
Where no blade springeth green
But pallid bells of the shy helleborine.
What is this ecstasy that overwhelms

The dreaming earth? See, the embrownèd elms
Crowding purple distances warm the depths of the wood;
A new-born wind tosses their tassels brown,
His white clouds dapple the down;
Into a green flame bursting the hedgerows stand;
Soon, with banners flying, Spring will walk the land….

There is no day for thee, my soul, like this,
No spring of lovely words. Nay, even the kiss
Of mortal love that maketh man divine
This light cannot outshine:
Nay, even poets, they whose frail hands catch
The shadow of vanishing beauty, may not match
This leafy ecstasy. Sweet words may cull
Such magical beauty as time may not destroy;
But we, alas, are not more beautiful:
We cannot flower in beauty as in joy.
We sing, our musèd words are sped, and then
Poets are only men
Who age, and toil, and sicken…. This maim'd tree
May stand in leaf when I have ceased to be.

THE JOYOUS LOVER

O, now that I am free as the air
And fleet as clouds above,
I will wander everywhere
Over the ways I love.

Lightly, lightly will I pass
Nor scatter as I go
A shadow on the blowing grass
Or a footprint in the snow.

All the wild things of the wood

That once were timid and shy
They shall not flee their solitude
For fear, when I pass by;

And beauty, beauty, the wide world over,
Shall blush when I draw near:
She knows her lover, the joyous lover,
And greets him without fear.

But if I come to the dark room
From which our love hath fled
And bend above you in the gloom
Or kneel beside your bed,

Smile soft in your sleep, my beautiful one,
For if you should say 'Nay'
To the dream which visiteth you alone,
My joy would wither away.

DEAD POETS

ODE WRITTEN AT WILTON HOUSE

Last night, amazed, I trod on holy ground
Breathing an air that ancient poets knew,
Where, in a valley compassed with sweet sound,
Beneath a garden's alley'd shades of yew,
With eager feet passèd that singer sweet
Who Stella loved, whom bloody Zutphen slew
In the starred zenith of his knightly fame.
There too a dark-stoled figure I did meet:
Herbert, whose faith burned true

And steadfast as the altar candle's flame.

Under the Wilton cedars, pondering
Upon the pains of Beauty and the wrong
That sealeth lovely lips, fated to sing,
Before they reach the cadence of their song,
I mused upon dead poets: mighty ones
Who sang and suffered: briefly heard were they
As Libyan nightingales weary of wing
Fleeing the temper of Saharan suns
To gladden our moon'd May,
And with the broken blossom vanishing.

So to my eyes a sorrowful vision came
Of one whose name was writ in water: bright
His cheeks and eyes burned with a hectic flame;
And one, alas! I saw whose passionate might
Was spent upon a fevered fen in Greece;
One shade there was who, starving, choked with bread;
One, a drown'd corpse, through stormy water slips;
One in the numbing poppy-juice found peace;
And one, a youth, lay dead
With powdered arsenic upon his lips.

O bitter were the sorrow that could dull
The sombre music of slow evening
Here, where the old world is so beautiful
That even lesser lips are moved to sing
How the wide heron sails into the light
Black as the cedarn shadows on the lawns
Or stricken woodlands patient in decay,
And river water murmurs through the night
Until autumnal dawns
Burn in the glass of Nadder's watery way.

Nay, these were they by whom the world was lost,
To whom the world most richly gave: forlorn
Beauty they worshipp'd, counting not the cost
If of their torment beauty might be born;
And life, the splendid flower of their delight,

Loving too eagerly, they broke, and spill'd
The perfume that the folded petals close
Before its prime; yet their frail fingers white
From that bruised bloom distill'd
Uttermost attar of the living rose.

Wherefore, O shining ones, I will not mourn
You, who have ravish'd beauty's secret ways
Beneath death's impotent shadow, suffering scorn,
Hatred, and desolation in her praise....
Thus as I spoke their phantom faces smiled,
As brooding night with heavy downward wing
Fell upon Wilton's elegiac stone,
On the dark woodlands and the waters wild
And every living thing--
Leaving me there amazèd and alone.

PORTON WATER

Through Porton village, under the bridge,
A clear bourne floweth, with grasses trailing,
Wherein are shadows of white clouds sailing,
And elms that shelter under the ridge.

Through Porton village we passed one day,
Marching the plain for mile on mile,
And crossed the bridge in single file,
Happily singing, and marched away

Over the bridge where the shallow races,
Under a clear and frosty sky:
And the winterbourne, as we marched by,
Mirrored a thousand laughing faces.

O, do we trouble you, Porton river,

We who laughing passed, and after
Found a resting-place for laughter?
Over here, where the poplars shiver

By stagnant waters, we lie rotten.
On windless nights, in the lonely places,
There, where the winter water races,
O, Porton river, are we forgotten?

Through Porton village, under the bridge,
The clear bourne floweth with grasses trailing,
Wherein are shadows of light cloud sailing,
And elms that shelter under the ridge.

The pale moon she comes and looks;
Over the lonely spire she climbs;
For there she is lovelier many times
Than in the little broken brooks.

AN OLD HOUSE

No one lives in the old house; long ago
The voices of men and women left it lonely.
They shuttered the sightless windows in a row,
Imprisoning empty darkness--darkness only.

Beyond the garden-closes, with sudden thunder
The lumbering troop-train passing clanks and jangles;
And I, a stranger, peer with careless wonder
Into the thickets of the garden tangles.

Yet, as I pass, a transient vision dawns
Ghostly upon my pondering spirit's gloom,
Of grey lavender bushes and weedy lawns
And a solitary cherry-tree in bloom….

No one lives in the old house: year by year
The plaster crumbles on the lonely walls:
The apple falls in the lush grass; the pear,
Pulpy with ripeness, on the pathway falls.

Yet this the garden was, where, on spring nights
Under the cherry-blossom, lovers plighted
Have wondered at the moony billows white,
Dreaming uncountable springs by love delighted;

Whose ears have heard the blackbird's jolly whistle,
The shadowy cries of bats in twilight flitting
Zigzag beneath the eaves; or, on the thistle,
The twitter of autumn birds swinging and sitting;

Whose eyes, on winter evenings, slow returning
Saw on the frosted paths pale lamplight fall
Streaming, or, on the hearth, red embers burning,
And shadows of children playing in the hall.

Where have they gone, lovers of another day?
(No one lives in the old house; long ago
They shuttered the sightless windows....) Where are they,
Whose eyes delighted in this moony snow?

I cannot tell ... and little enough they care,
Though April spray the cherry-boughs with light,
And autumn pile her harvest unaware
Under the walls that echoed their delight.

I cannot tell ... yet I am as those lovers;
For me, who pass on my predestinate way,
The prodigal blossom billows and recovers
In ghostly gardens a hundred miles away.

Yet, in my heart, a melancholy rapture
Tells me that eyes, which now an iron haste
Hurries to iron days, may here recapture

A vision of ancient loveliness gone to waste.

THE DHOWS

South of Guardafui with a dark tide flowing
We hailed two ships with tattered canvas bent to the monsoon,
Hung betwixt the outer sea and pale surf showing
Where dead cities of Libya lay bleaching in the moon.

'Oh whither be ye sailing with torn sails broken?'
'We sail, we sail for Sheba, at Suliman's behest,
With carven silver phalli for the ebony maids of Ophir
From brown-skinned baharias of Arabia the Blest.'

'Oh whither be ye sailing, with your dark flag flying?'
'We sail, with creaking cedar, towards the Northern Star.
The helmsman singeth wearily, and in our hold are lying
A hundred slaves in shackles from the marts of Zanzibar.'

'Oh whither be ye sailing...?'
'Alas, we sail no longer:
Our hulls are wrack, our sails are dust, as any man might know.
And why should you torment us? ... Your iron keels are stronger
Than ghostly ships that sailed from Tyre a thousand years ago.'

THE GIFT

Marching on Tanga, marching the parch'd plain
Of wavering spear-grass past Pangani River,
England came to me--me who had always ta'en
But never given before--England, the giver,

In a vision of three poplar-trees that shiver
On still evenings of summer, after rain,
By Slapton Ley, where reed-beds start and quiver
When scarce a ripple moves the upland grain.
Then I thanked God that now I had suffered pain,
And, as the parch'd plain, thirst, and lain awake
Shivering all night through till cold daybreak:
In that I count these sufferings my gain
And her acknowledgment. Nay, more, would fain
Suffer as many more for her sweet sake.

FIVE DEGREES SOUTH

I love all waves and lovely water in motion,
That wavering iris in comb of the blown spray:
Iris of tumbled nautilus in the wake's commotion,
Their spread sails dipped in a marmoreal way
Unquarried, wherein are greeny bubbles blowing
Plumes of faint spray, cool in the deep
And lucent seas, that pause not in their flowing
To lap the southern starlight while they sleep.
These I have seen, these I have loved and known:
I have seen Jupiter, that great star, swinging
Like a ship's lantern, silent and alone
Within his sea of sky, and heard the singing
Of the south trade, that siren of the air,
Who shivers the taut shrouds, and singeth there.

104° FAHRENHEIT

To-night I lay with fever in my veins

Consumed, tormented creature of fire and ice,
And, weaving the enhavock'd brain's device,
Dreamed that for evermore I must walk these plains
Where sunlight slayeth life, and where no rains
Abated the fierce air, nor slaked its fire:
So that death seemed the end of all desire,
To ease the distracted body of its pains.
And so I died, and from my eyes the glare
Faded, nor had I further need of breath;
But when I reached my hand to find you there
Beside me, I found nothing.... Lonely was death.
And with a cry I wakened, but to hear
Thin wings of fever singing in my ear.

FEVER-TREES

The beautiful Acacia
She sighs in desert lands:
Over the burning waterways
Of Africa she sways and sways,
Even where no air glideth
In cooling green she stands.

The beautiful Acacia
She hath a yellow dress:
A slender trunk of lemon sheen
Gleameth through the tender green
(Where the thorn hideth)
Shielding her loveliness.

The beautiful Acacia
Dwelleth in deadly lands:
Over the brooding waterways
Where death breedeth, she sways and sways,
And no man long abideth

In valleys where she stands.

THE RAIN-BIRD

High on the tufted baobab-tree
To-night a rain-bird sang to me
A simple song, of three notes only,
That made the wilderness more lonely;

For in my brain it echoed nearly,
Old village church bells chiming clearly:
The sweet cracked bells, just out of tune,
Over the mowing grass in June--

Over the mowing grass, and meadows
Where the low sun casts long shadows.
And cuckoos call in the twilight
From elm to elm, in level flight.

Now through the evening meadows move
Slow couples of young folk in love,
Who pause at every crooked stile
And kiss in the hawthorn's shade the while:

Like pale moths the summer frocks
Hover between the beds of phlox,
And old men, feeling it is late,
Cease their gossip at the gate,

Till deeper still the twilight grows,
And night blossometh, like a rose
Full of love and sweet perfume,
Whose heart most tender stars illume.

Here the red sun sank like lead,

And the sky blackened overhead;
Only the locust chirped at me
From the shadowy baobab-tree.

MOTHS

When I lay wakeful yesternight
My fever's flame was a clear light,
A taper, flaring in the wind,
Whither, fluttering out of the dim
Night, many dreams glimmered by.
Like moths, out of the darkness, blind,
Hurling at that taper's flame,
From drinking honey of the night's flowers
Into my circled light they came:
So near I could see their soft colours,
Grey of the dove, most soothely grey;
But my heat singed their wings, and away
Darting into the dark again,
They escaped me....
Others floated down
Like those vaned seeds that fall
In autumn from the sycamore's crown
When no leaf trembleth nor branch is stirred,
More silent in flight than any bird,
Or bat's wings flitting in darkness, soft
As lizards moving on a white wall
They came quietly from aloft
Down through my circle of light, and so
Into unlighted gloom below.
But one dream, strong-winged, daring
Flew beating at the heart of the flame
Till I feared it would have put out my light,
My thin taper, fitfully flaring,
And that I should be left alone in the night

With no more dreams for my delight.

Can it be that from the dead
Even their dreams, their dreams are fled?

BÊTE HUMAINE

Riding through Ruwu swamp, about sunrise,
I saw the world awake; and as the ray
Touched the tall grasses where they dream till day,
Lo, the bright air alive with dragonflies,
With brittle wings aquiver, and great eyes
Piloting crimson bodies, slender and gay.
I aimed at one, and struck it, and it lay
Broken and lifeless, with fast-fading dyes…
Then my soul sickened with a sudden pain
And horror, at my own careless cruelty,
That where all things are cruel I had slain
A creature whose sweet life it is to fly:
Like beasts that prey with bloody claw…
        Nay, they
Must slay to live, but what excuse had I?

DOVES

On the edge of the wild-wood
Grey doves fluttering:
Grey doves of Astarte
To the woods at daybreak
Lazily uttering
Their murmured enchantment,

Old as man's childhood;

While she, pale divinity
Of hidden evil,
Silvers the regions chaste
Of cold sky, and broodeth
Over forests primeval
And all that thorny waste's
Wooded infinity.

'Lovely goddess of groves,'
Cried I, 'what enchanted
Sinister recesses
Of these lone shades
May still be haunted
By thy demon caresses,
Thy unholy loves?'

But clear day quelleth
Her dominion lonely,
And the soft ring-dove,
Murmuring, telleth
That dark sin only
From man's lust springeth,
In man's heart dwelleth.

SONG

I made a song in my love's likeness
From colours of my quietude,
From trees whose blossoms shine no less
Than butterflies in the wild-wood.

I laid claim on all beauty
Under the sun to praise her wonder,

Till the noise of war swept over me,
Stopp'd my singing mouth with thunder.

The angel of death hath swift wings,
I heard him strip the huddled trees
Overhead, as a hornet sings,
And whip the grass about my knees.

Down we crouched in the parchèd dust,
Down beneath that deadly rain:
Dead still I lay, as lie one must
Who hath a bullet in his brain.

Dead they left me: but my soul, waking,
Quietly laughed at their distress
Who guessed not that I still was making
That new song in my love's likeness.

BEFORE ACTION

Now the wind of the dawn sighs,
Now red embers have burned white,
Under the darkness faints and dies
The slow-beating heart of night.

Into the darkness my eyes peer
Seeing only faces steel'd,
And level eyes that know not fear;
Yet each heart is a battlefield

Where phantom armies foin and feint
And bloody victories are won
From the time when stars are faint
To the rising of the sun.

With banners broken, and the roll
Of drums, at dawn the phantoms fly:
A man must commune with his soul
When he marches out to die.

O day of wrath and of desire!
For each may know upon this day
Whether he be a thing of fire
Or fettered to the traitor clay.

Such is the hazard that is thrown:
We know not how the dice may fall:
All the secrets shall be known
Or else we shall not know at all.

ON A SUBALTERN KILLED IN ACTION

Into that dry and most desolate place
With heavy gait they dragged the stretcher in
And laid him on the bloody ground: the din
Of Maxim fire ceased not. I raised his head,
And looked into his face,
And saw that he was dead.
Saw beneath matted curls the broken skin
That let the bullet in;
And saw the limp, lithe limbs, the smiling mouth…
(Ah, may we smile at death
As bravely….) the curv'd lips that no more drouth
Should blacken, and no sweetly stirring breath
Mildly displace.
So I covered the calm face
And stripped the shirt from his firm breast, and there,
A zinc identity disc, a bracelet of elephant hair
I found…. Ah, God, how deep it stings
This unendurable pity of small things!

But more than this I saw,
That dead stranger welcoming, more than the raw
And brutal havoc of war.
England I saw, the mother from whose side
He came hither and died, she at whose hems he had play'd,
In whose quiet womb his body and soul were made.
That pale, estrangèd flesh that we bowed over
Had breathed the scent in summer of white clover;
Dreamed her cool fading nights, her twilights long,
And days as careless as a blackbird's song
Heard in the hush of eve, when midges' wings
Make a thin music, and the night-jar spins.
(For it is summer, I thought, in England now....)
And once those forward gazing eyes had seen
Her lovely living green: that blackened brow
Cool airs, from those blue hills moving, had fann'd--
Breath of that holy land
Whither my soul aspireth without despair:
In the broken brain had many a lovely word
Awakened magical echoes of things heard,
Telling of love and laughter and low voices,
And tales in which the English heart rejoices
In vanishing visions of childhood and its glories:
Old-fashioned nursery rhymes and fairy stories:
Words that only an English tongue could tell.

And the firing died away; and the night fell
On our battle. Only in the sullen sky
A prairie fire, with huge fantastic flame
Leapt, lighting dark clouds charged with thunder.
And my heart was sick with shame
That there, in death, he should lie,
Crying: 'Oh, why am I alive, I wonder?'

In a dream I saw war riding the land:
Stark rode she, with bowed eyes, against the glare
Of sack'd cities smouldering in the dark,
A tired horse, lean, with outreaching head,
And hid her face of dread....
Yet, in my passion would I look on her,

Crying, O hark,
Thou pale one, whom now men say bearest the scythe
Of God, that iron scythe forged by his thunder
For reaping of nations overripened, fashioned
Upon the clanging anvil whose sparks, flying
In a starry night, dying, fall hereunder....
But she, she heeded not my cry impassioned
Nor turned her face of dread,
Urging the tired horse, with outreaching head,
O thou, cried I, who choosest for thy going
These bloomy meadows of youth, these flowery ways
Whereby no influence strays
Ruder than a cold wind blowing,
Or beating needles of rain,
Why must thou ride again
Ruthless among the pastures yet unripened,
Crushing their beauty in thine iron track
Downtrodden, ravish'd in thy following flame,
Parched and black?
But she, she stayed not in her weary haste
Nor turned her face; but fled:
And where she passed the lands lay waste....

And now I cannot tell whither she rideth:
But tired, tired rides she.
Yet know I well why her dread face she hideth:
She is pale and faint to death. Yea, her day faileth,
Nor all her blood, nor all her frenzy burning,
Nor all her hate availeth:
For she passeth out of sight
Into that night
From which none, none returneth
To waste the meadows of youth,
Nor vex thine eyelids, Routhe,
O sorrowful sister, soother of our sorrow.
And a hope within me springs
That fair will be the morrow,
And that charred plain,
Those flowery meadows, shall rejoice at last
In a sweet, clean

Freshness, as when the green
Grass springeth, where the prairie fire hath passed.

AFTER ACTION

All through that day of battle the broken sound
Of shattering Maxim fire made mad the wood;
So that the low trees shuddered where they stood,
And echoes bellowed in the bush around:
But when, at last the light of day was drowned,
That madness ceased.... Ah, God, but it was good!
There, in the reek of iodine and blood,
I flung me down upon the thorny ground.
So quiet was it, I might well have been lying
In a room I love, where the ivy cluster shakes
Its dew upon the lattice panes at even:
Where rusty ivory scatters from the dying
Jessamine blossom, and the musk-rose breaks
Her dusky bloom beneath a summer heaven.

SONNET

Not only for remembered loveliness,
England, my mother, my own, we hold thee rare
Who toil, and fight, and sicken beneath the glare
Of brazen skies that smile on our duress,
Making us crave thy cloudy state no less
Than the sweet clarity of thy rain-wash'd air,
Meadows in moonlight cool, and every fair
Slow-fading flower of thy summer dress:
Not for thy flowers, but for the unfading crown

Of sacrifice our happy brothers wove thee:
The joyous ones who laid thy beauty down
Nor stayed to see it shamed. For these we love thee,
For this (O love, O dread!) we hold thee more
Divinely fair to-day than heretofore.

A FAREWELL TO AFRICA

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Now once again, upon the pole-star's bearing,
We plough these furrowed fields where no blade springeth;
Again the busy trade in the halyards singeth
Sun-whitened spindrift from the blown wave shearing;
The uncomplaining sea suffers our faring;
In a brazen glitter our little wake is lost,
And the starry south rolls over until no ghost
Remaineth of us and all our pitiful daring;
For the sea beareth no trace of man's endeavour,
His might enarmoured, his prosperous argosies,
Soundless, within her unsounded caves, forever
She broodeth, knowing neither war nor peace,
And our grey cruisers holds in mind no more
Than the cedarn fleets that Sheba's treasure bore.

SONG

What is the worth of war
In a world that turneth, turneth
About a tired star
Whose flaming centre burneth
No longer than the space
Of the spent atom's race:

Where conquered lands, soon, soon
Lie waste as the pale moon?

What is the worth of art
In a world that fast forgetteth
Those who have wrung its heart
With beauty that love begetteth,
Whose faint flames vanish quite
In that star-powdered night
Where even the mighty ones
Shine only as far suns?

And what is beauty worth,
Sweet beauty, that persuadeth
Of her immortal birth,
Then, as a flower, fadeth:
Or love, whose tender years
End with the mourner's tears,
Die, when the mourner's breath
Is quiet, at last, in death?

Beauty and love are one,
Even when fierce war clashes:
Even when our fiery sun
Hath burnt itself to ashes,
And the dead planets race
Unlighted through blind space,
Beauty will still shine there:
Wherefore, I worship her.

THE HAWTHORN SPRAY

I saw a thrush light on a hawthorn spray,
One moment only, spilling creamy blossom,
While the bough bent beneath her speckled bosom,

Bent, and recovered, and she fluttered away.

The branch was still; but, in my heart, a pain
Than the thorn'd spray more cruel, stabbed me, only
Remembering days in a far land and lonely
When I had never hoped for summer again.

THE PAVEMENT

In bitter London's heart of stone,
Under the lamplight's shielded glare.
I saw a soldier's body thrown
Unto the drabs that traffic there

Pacing the pavements with slow feet:
Those old pavements whose blown dust
Throttles the hot air of the street,
And the darkness smells of lust.

The chaste moon, with equal glance,
Looked down on the mad world, astare
At those who conquered in sad France
And those who perished in Leicester Square.

And in her light his lips were pale:
Lips that love had moulded well:
Out of the jaws of Passchendaele
They had sent him to this nether hell.

I had no stone of scorn to fling,
For I know not how the wrong began--
But I had seen a hateful thing
Masked in the dignity of man:

And hate and sorrow and hopeless anger

Swept my heart, as the winds that sweep
Angrily through the leafless hanger
When winter rises from the deep....

* * * * *

I would that war were what men dream:
A crackling fire, a cleansing flame,
That it might leap the space between
And lap up London and its shame.

To LYDIA LOPOKOVA

HER GARLAND

O thou who comest to our wintry shade
Gay and light-footed as the virgin Spring,
Before whose shining feet the cherries fling
Their moony tribute, when the sloe is sprayed
With light, and all things musical are made:
O thou who art Spring's daughter, who can bring
Blossom, or song of bird, or anything
To match the youth in which you stand arrayed?
Not that rich garland Meleager twined
In his sun-guarded glade above the blue
That flashes from the burning Tyrian seas:
No, you are cooler, sweeter than the wind
That wakes our woodlands; so I bring to you
These wind-blown blossoms of anemones.

HER VARIETY

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Soft as a pale moth flitting in moonshine
I saw thee flutter to the shadowy call
That beckons from the strings of Carneval,
O frail and fragrant image of Columbine:
So, when the spectre of the rose was thine,
A flower wert thou, and last I saw thee fall
In Cleopatra's stormy bacchanal
Flown with the red insurgence of the vine.
O moth, O flower, O mænad, which art thou?
Shadowy, beautiful, or leaping wild
As stormlight over savage Tartar skies?
Such were my ancient questionings; but now
I know that you are nothing but a child
With a red flower's mouth and hazel eyes.

HER SWIFTNESS

You are too swift for poetry, too fleet
For any musèd numbers to ensnare:
Swifter than music dying on the air
Or bloom upon rose-petals, fades the sweet
Vanishing magic of your flying feet,
Your poisèd finger, and your shining hair:
Words cannot tell how wonderful you were,
Or how one gesture made a joy complete.
And since you know my pen may never capture
The transient swift loveliness of you,
Come, let us salve our sense of the world's loss
Remembering, with a melancholy rapture,
How many dancing-girls ... and poets too...
Dream in the dust of Hecatompylos.

GHOSTLY LOVES

'Oh why,' my darling prayeth me, 'must you sing
For ever of ghostly loves, phantasmal passion?
Seeing that you never loved me after that fashion
And the love I gave was not a phantom thing,
But delight of eager lips and strong arms folding
The beauty of yielding arms and of smooth shoulder,
All fluent grace of which you were the moulder:
And I.... Oh, I was happy for your holding.'
'Ah, do you not know, my dearest, have you not seen
The shadow that broodeth over things that perish:
How age may mock sweet moments that have been
And death defile the beauty that we cherish?
Wherefore, sweet spirit, I thank thee for thy giving:
'Tis my spirit that embraceth thee dead or living.'

FEBRUARY

The robin on my lawn,
He was the first to tell
How, in the frozen dawn,
This miracle befell,
Waking the meadows white
With hoar, the iron road
Agleam with splintered light,
And ice where water flowed:
Till, when the low sun drank
Those milky mists that cloak
Hanger and hollied bank,
The winter world awoke
To hear the feeble bleat
Of lambs on downland farms:
A blackbird whistled sweet;
Old beeches moved their arms
Into a mellow haze
Aerial, newly-born:

And I, alone, agaze,
Stood waiting for the thorn
To break in blossom white
Or burst in a green flame…
So, in a single night,
Fair February came,
Bidding my lips to sing
Or whisper their surprise,
With all the joy of spring
And morning in her eyes.

SONG OF THE DARK AGES

We digged our trenches on the down
Beside old barrows, and the wet
White chalk we shovelled from below;
It lay like drifts of thawing snow
On parados and parapet:

Until a pick neither struck flint
Nor split the yielding chalky soil,
But only calcined human bone:
Poor relic of that Age of Stone
Whose ossuary was our spoil.

Home we marched singing in the rain,
And all the while, beneath our song,
I mused how many springs should wane
And still our trenches scar the plain:
The monument of an old wrong.

But then, I thought, the fair green sod
Will wholly cover that white stain,
And soften, as it clothes the face
Of those old barrows, every trace

Of violence to the patient plain.

And careless people, passing by,
Will speak of both in casual tone:
Saying: 'You see the toil they made:
The age of iron, pick, and spade,
Here jostles with the Age of Stone.'

Yet either from that happier race
Will merit but a passing glance;
And they will leave us both alone:
Poor savages who wrought in stone--
Poor savages who fought in France.

WINTER SUNSET

Athwart the blackening bars of pines benighted,
The sun, descending to the zones of denser
Cloud that o'erhung the long horizon, lighted
Upon the crown of earth a flaming censer
From which white clouds of incense, overflowing,
Filled the chill clarity from whence the swallows
Had lately fled with wreathèd vapours, showing
Like a fine bloom over the lonely fallows:
Where, with the pungent breath of mist was blended
A faint aroma of pine-needles sodden
By autumn rains, and fainter still, ascended
Beneath high woods the scent of leaves downtrodden.
It was a moment when the earth, that sickened
For Spring, as lover when the beloved lingers,
Lay breathless, while the distant goddess quickened
Some southern hill-side with her glowing fingers:
And so, it seemed, the drowsy lands were shaken,
Stirred in their sleep, and sighed, as though the pain
Of a strange dream had bidden them awaken

To frozen days and bitter nights again.

SONG

Why have you stolen my delight
In all the golden shows of Spring
When every cherry-tree is white
And in the limes the thrushes sing,

O fickler than the April day,
O brighter than the golden broom,
O blyther than the thrushes' lay,
O whiter than the cherry-bloom,

O sweeter than all things that blow ...
Why have you only left for me
The broom, the cherry's crown of snow,
And thrushes in the linden-tree?

ENGLAND--APRIL, 1918

Last night the North flew at the throat of Spring
With spite to tear her greening banners down,
Tossing the elm-tree's tender tassels brown,
The virgin blossom of sloe burdening
With colder snow; beneath his frosty sting
Patient, the newly-wakened woods were bowed
By drownèd fields where stormy waters flowed:
Yet, on the thorn, I heard a blackbird sing....
'Too late, too late,' he sang, 'this wintry spite;
For molten snow will feed the springing grass:

The tide of life, it floweth with the year.'
O England, England, thou that standest upright
Against the tide of death, the bad days pass:
Know, by this miracle, that summer is near.

SLENDER THEMES

When, by a happier race, these leaves are turned,
They'll wonder that such quiet themes engaged
A soldier's mind when noisy wars were waged,
And half the world in one red bonfire burned.
'When that fierce age,' they'll say, 'went up in flame
He lived ... or died, seeing those bright deeds done
Whereby our sweet and settled peace was won,
Yet offereth slender dreams, not deeds, to Fame.'
Then say: 'Out of the heart the mouth speaketh,
And mine was as the hearts of other men
Whom those dark days impassioned; yet it seeketh
To paint the sombre woes that held us then,
No more than the cloud-rending levin's light
Seeks to illumine the sad skies of night.'

INVOCATION

Whither, O, my sweet mistress, must I follow thee?
For when I hear thy distant footfall nearing,
And wait on thy appearing,
Lo! my lips are silent: no words come to me.

Once I waylaid thee in green forest covers,
Hoping that spring might free my lips with gentle fingers;

Alas! her presence lingers
No longer than on the plain the shadow of brown kestrel hovers.

Through windless ways of the night my spirit followed after;--
Cold and remote were they, and there, possessed
By a strange unworldly rest,
Awaiting thy still voice heard only starry laughter.

The pillared halls of sleep echoed my ghostly tread.
Yet when their secret chambers I essayed
My spirit sank, dismayed,
Waking in fear to find the new-born vision fled.

Once indeed--but then my spirit bloomed in leafy rapture--
I loved; and once I looked death in the eyes:
So, suddenly made wise,
Spoke of such beauty as I may never recapture....

Whither, O, divine mistress, must I then follow thee?
Is it only in love ... say, is it only in death
That the spirit blossometh,
And words that may match my vision shall come to me?

THAMAR

(*To Thamar Karsavina*)

Once in the sombre light of the throng'd courts of night,
In a dream-haunted land only inhabited
By the unhappy dead, came one who, anxious eyed,
Clung to my idle hand with clenched fingers weak
And gazed into my eyes as he had wrongs to speak.
Silent he stood and wan, more pallid than the leaves
Of an aspen blown under a wind that grieves.
Then I: 'O haggard one, say from what ghostly zone

Of thwarted destinies or torment hast thou come?
Tell me thy race and name!' And he, with veiled face:
'I have neither name nor race, but I have travelled far,
A timeless avatar of never-ending dooms,
Out of those tyrannous glooms where, like a tired star
In stormy darkness, looms the castle of Thamar...
Once in a lonely dawn my eager spirit fared
By ways that no men dared unto a desert land,
Where, on a sullen strand, a mouldering city, vast
As towered Babylon, stood in the dreamy sand--
Older a million years: Babel was builded on
That broken city's tears; dust of her crumbled past
Rose from the rapid wheels of Babel's charioteers
In whorled clouds above those shining thoroughfares
Where Babel's millions tread on her unheeding dead.
Forth from an eastern gate where the lips of Asia wait
Parch'd with an ancient thirst that no æons can abate,
Passed I, predestinate, to a thorn'd desert's drought,
Where the rivers of the south, flowing in a cloudy spate,
Spend at last their splendid strength in a sea of molten glass
Seething with the brazen might of a white sun dipped at length
Like a baked stone, burning hot, plunged in a hissing pot.
Out of that solemn portal over the tawny waste,
Without stay, without haste, nor the joy of any mortal
Glance of eye or clasp of hand, desolate, in a burning land,
Lonely days and nights I travelled and the changing seasons squandered
Friendless, endlessly, I wandered nor my woven fate unravelled;
Drawn to a hidden goal, sore, forlorn with waiting,
Seeking I knew not what, yet unhesitating
Struggled my hapless soul...
There, in a thousand springs,
Slow, beneath frozen snow, where the blind earth lay cringing,
Have I seen the steppe unfold uncounted blossomings,
Where salty pools shone fair in a quivering blue air
That shivered every fringing reed-bed with cool delight,
And fanned the mazy flight of slow-wing'd egrets white
Beating and wheeling bright against the sun astare;
But I could not hear their wings for they were ghostly things
Sent by the powers of night to mock my sufferings
And rain upon the bitter waterpools their drops aglitter.

Yet, when these lakes accursed tortured my aching thirst,
The green reeds fell to dust, the cool pools to a crust
Of frozen salt crystallised to taunt my broken lips,
To cheat my staring eyes, as a vision of great ships
With moving towers of sail, poops throng'd with grinning crowds
And a wind in their shrouds, bears down upon the pale
Wasted castaway afloat with the salt in his throat
And a feeble wild desire to be quenched of his fire
In the green gloom beneath.
So, again and again,
Hath a phantom city thrust to the visionary vault
Of inviolate cobalt, dome and dreaming minaret
Mosque and gleaming water-tower hazy in a fountain's jet
Or a market's rising dust; and my lips have cried aloud
To see them tremble there, though I knew within my heart
They were chiselled out of cloud or carven of thin air;
And my fingers clenched my hand, for I wondered if this land
Of my stony pilgrimage were a glimmering mirage,
And I myself no more than a phantom of the sand.
'But beyond these fading slender cities, many leagues away,
Strange brooding mountains lay heaped, crowding range on range
In a changing cloudy splendour; and beyond, in lakes of light,
As eastward still I staggered, there swam into my sight,
More vast and hoar and haggard, shoulders of ice and snow
Bounding the heavens low of burnished brass, whereunder
The hot plains of Cathay perpetually slumber:
Where tawny millions breed in cities without number,
Whither, a hill-born thunder, rolling on Tartary
With torrents and barb'd lightning, swelleth the yellow river
To a tumult of whitening foam and confusèd might
That drowns in a single night many a mud-made city;
And cities of boats, and frail cities of lath and reed,
Are whirled away without pity or set afloat in a pale,
Swirling, shallow sea ... and their names seem lost for ever
Till a stranger nomad race drive their herds to the sad place
Where old sorrows lie forgotten, and raise upon the rotten
Level waste another brood to await another flood.
'But I never might attain to this melancholy plain
For the mountains rose between; stark in my path they lay
Between me and Cathay, through moving mist half-seen.

And I knew that they were real, for their drooping folds of cloud
Enwrapped me in a shroud, and the air that fell at night
From their frozen summits white slid like an ice-blue steel
Into my living breast and stilled the heart within
As the chill of an old sin that robs a man of rest,
Killing all delight in the silence of the night
And brooding black above till the heart dare not move
But lieth cold and numb ... and the dawn will not come.
'Yet to me a dawn came, new-kindled in cold flame,
Flinging the imminence of those inviolate snows
On the forest lawns below in a shadow more immense
Than their eternal vastness; and a new hope beyond reason,
Flamed in my heart's dark season, dazzled my pallid eyes,
Till, when the hot sun soared above the uttermost height,
A draught of keen delight into my body was poured,
For all that frozen fastness lay flowered with the spring:
Her starry blossoms broke beneath my bruisèd feet,
And their beauty was so sweet to me I kissed them where they lay;
Yea, I bent my weary hips and kissed them with dry lips,
Tenderly, only dreading lest their petals delicate
Should be broken by my treading, for I lived, I lived again,
And my heart would have been broken by a living creature's pain,
So I kissed them for a token of my joy in their new birth,
And I kissed the gentle earth. Slowly the shadows crept
To the bases of the crags, and I slept....
'Once, in another life, had I remembered sleep,
When tired children creep on to their mother's knees,
And there a dreamless peace more quietly descendeth
Than gentle evening endeth or ring-doves fold their wings,
Before the nightjar spins or the nightingale begins;
When the brooding hedgerow trees where they nest lie awake
And breathe so soft they shake not a single shuddering leaf
Lest the silence should break.
'Other sleep have I known,
Deeper, beyond belief, when straining limbs relax
After hot human toil in yellow harvest fields
Where the panting earth yields a smell of baked soil,
And the dust of dry stubbles blows over the whitening
Shocks of lank grain and bundles of flax,
And men fling themselves down forgetting their troubles,

Unheedful of the song that the landrail weaves along
Misty woodlands, or lightning that the pale sky laves
Like phosphorescent waves washing summer seas:
And, more beautiful than these, that sleep of dazèd wonder
When love has torn asunder the veils of the sky
And raptured lovers lie faint in each other's arms
Beneath a heaven strewn with myriad starry swarms,
Where planets float like lonely gold-flowered nenuphars
In pools of the sky; yet, when they wake, they turn
From those burning galaxies seeking heaven only
In each other's eyes, and sigh, and sleep again;
For while they sleep they seem to forget the world's pain,
And when they wake, they dream....
'But other sleep was mine
As I had drunk of wine with bitter hemlock steep'd,
Or sousèd with the heapèd milky poppyheads
A drowsy Tartar treads where slow waters sweep
Over red river beds, and the air is heavy with sleep.
So, when I woke at last, the labouring earth had rolled
Eastward under the vast dominion of night,
Funereal, forlorn as that unlighted chamber
Wherein she first was born, bereft of all starlight,
Pale silver of the moon, or the low sun's amber.
'Then to my queen I prayed, grave Ashtoreth, whose shade
Hallows the dim abyss of Heliopolis,
Where many an olive maid clashed kissing Syrian cymbals,
And silver-sounding timbrels shivered through the vale.
O lovely, and O white, under the holy night
Is their gleaming wonder, and their brows are pale
As the new risen moon, dancing till they swoon
In far forests under desolate Lebanon,
While the flame of Moloch's pyre reddens the sea-born cloud
That overshadows Tyre; so, when I cried aloud,
Behold, a torch of fire leapt on the mountain-side!
'O bright, O beautiful! for never kindlier light
Fell on the darkened sight of mortal eyes and dull
Since that devoted one, whom gloomy Caucasus
In icy silence lonely bound to his cruel shoulders,
Brought to benighted men in a hollow fennel-stem
Sparks of the torrid vapour that burned behind the bars

Of evening, broke dawn's rose, or smouldered in the stars,
Or lit the glowworm's taper, or wavered over the fen,
Or tipped the javelin of the far-ravening levin,
Lash of the Lord of Heaven and bitter scourge of sin.
O beautiful, O bright! my tired sinews strained
To this torch that flared and waned as a watery planet gloweth
And waneth in the night when a calm sea floweth
Under a misty sky spread with the tattered veils
Of rapid cloud driven over the deeps of heaven
By winds that range too high to sweep the languid sails.
On through the frozen night, like a blind moth flying
With battered wing and bruisèd bloom into a light,
I dragged my ragged limbs, cared not if I were dying,
Knew not if I were dead, where cavernous crevasses,
And stony desperate passes snared, waylaid my tread:
In the roar of broken boulders split from rocky shoulders,
In the thunder of snow sliding, or under the appalling
Rending of glacier ice or hoarse cataracts falling:
And I knew not what could save me but the unholy guiding
That some demon gave me. Thrice I fell, and thrice
In torrents of blue ice-water slipp'd and was toss'd
Like a dead leaf, or a ghost
Harried by thin bufferings of wind
Downward to Tartarus at daybreak,
Downward to the regions of the lost....
But the rushing waters ceased, and the bitter wind fell:
How I cannot tell, unless that I had come
To the hollow heart of the storm where the wind is dumb;
And there my gelid blood thawed, glowed, and grew warm,
While a black-hooded form caught at my arm, and stayed
And held me as I swayed, until, at last, I saw
In a strange unworldly awe, at the gate of light I stood:
And I entered, alone....
'Behold a cavern of stone carven, and in the midst
A brazier that hissed with tongued flames, leaping
Over whitened embers of gummy frankincense,
Into a fume of dense and fragrant vapour, creeping
Over the roof to spread a milky coverlet
Softer than the woof of webby spider's net.
But never spider yet spun a more delicate wonder

Than that which hung thereunder, drooping fold on fold,
Silks that glowed with fire of tawny Oxus gold,
Richer than ever flowed from the eager fancy of man
In his vain desire for beauty that endures:
And on the floor were spread by many a heaped daiwan
Carpets of Kurdistan, cured skins, and water-ewers
Encrusted with such gems as emperors of Hind
(Swart conquerors, long dead) sought for their diadems.

No other light was there but one torch, flaring
Against a square of sky possess'd by the wind,
And never another sound but the tongued flames creeping.
'At last, my eyes staring into the clouded gloom,
Saw that the caverned room with shadowy forms was strewn
In heavy sleep or swoon fallen, who did not move
But lay as mortals lie in the sweet release of love.
And stark between them stood huge eunuchs of ebony,
Mute, motionless, as they had been carven of black wood.
But these I scarcely saw, for, through the flame was seen
Another, a queen, with heavy closèd eyes
White against the skies of that empurpled night
In her loveliness she lay, and leaned upon her hand:
And my blood leapt at the sight, so that I could not stand
But fell upon my knees, pleading, and cried aloud
For her white loveliness as Ixion for his cloud:
And my cry the silence broke, and the sleepers awoke
From their slumber, stirred, and rose every one,--save those
Mute eunuchs of ebony, those frowning caryatides.
Slowly she looked at me, and when I cried again
In yearning and in pain, she beckoned with her hand.
Then from my knees rose I, and greatly daring,
Through the hazy air, past the brazier flaring
And the hissing flame, crept, until I came
Unto the carven seat, and kissed her white feet;
And she smiled, but spake not.
When she smiled the sleepers wavered as the grass
Of a cornfield wavers when the ears are swept
By the breath of brown reapers singing as they pass,
Or grass of woody glades when a wind that has slept
Wakens, and invades their moonlit solitude,

When the hazels shiver and the birch is blown
To a billow of silver, but oaks in the wood
Stand firm nor quiver, stand firm as stone:
So, amid the sleepers, the black eunuchs stood.
When the sleepers stirred faintly in the heat
Of that painted room a silken sound I heard,
And a thin music, sweet as the brown nightingale
Sings in the jealous shade of a lonely spinney,
Stranger far than any music mortal made
Fell softer than the dew falleth when stars are pale.
Sweet it was, and clear as light, or as the tears
That sad Narcissus wears in the spring of the year
On barren mountain ranges where rain falls cool
And every lonely pool is sprayed with broken light:
So cool, so beautiful, and so divinely strange
I doubted if it came from any marshy reed
Or hollow fluting stem pluck'd by the hands of men,
Unless it were indeed that airy fugitive
Syrinx, who cried and ran before the laughing eyes
Of goat-footed Pan, and must for ever live
A shadowy green reed by an Arcadian river--
But never music made of Ladon's reedy daughter
Or singing river-water more sweet than that which stole,
Slow as amber honey wells from the honeycomb,
Into my weary soul with solace and strange peace.
So, trembling as I lay in a dream more desolate
Than is the darkened day of the mid-winter north,
I heard the voice of one who sang in a strange tongue,
And I know not what he sang save that he sang of love,
The while they led me forth unheeding, till we came
Unto a chamber lit with one slow-burning flame
That yellow horn bedims, and laid me down, and there
They soothed my bruised limbs, and combed my tangled hair,
And salved my limbs with rarely-mingled unguents pressed
By hands of holy ones who dream beneath the suns
Of Araby the Blest, and so, when they had bathed
My burning eyes with milk of dreamy anodyne
And cool'd my throat with wine,
In robings of cool silk my broken body they swathed,
Sandals of gold they placed upon my feet, and round

My sad sun-blistered brows a silver fillet bound--
Decking me with the pride of a bridegroom that goes
To the joy of his bride and is lovely in her eyes--
And led me to her side. Then, as a conquering prince,
I, who long since had been battered and tost
Like a dead leaf or ghost buffeted by wild storms,
Came to her white arms, conquering, and was lost,
Yet dared not gaze upon the beauty that I dreamed.
So, in my trance, it seemed that a shadowy soft dance
Coiled slowly and unwound, swayed, beckoned, and recovered
As hooded cobra bound by hollow spells of sound
Unto the piper sways; so silently they hovered
I only heard the beat of their naked feet,
And then, another sound....
A dull throb thrumming, a noise of faint drumming,
Threatening, coming nearer, piercing deeper
Than a dream lost in the heart of a sleeper
Into those deeps where the dark fire gloweth,
The secret flame that every man knoweth,
Embers that smoulder, fires that none can fan,
Terrible, older than the mind of man....
Before he crawled from his swamp and spurned
The life of the beast that dark fire burned
In the hidden deeps where no dream can come:
Only the throbbing of a drum
Can wake it from its smouldering--
Sightless, soundless, senseless, dumb--
Dumb as those blind seeds that lie
Drown'd in mud, and shuddering,
I knew that I was man no more,
But a throbbing core of flesh, that knew
Nor beauty, nor truth, nor anything
But the black sky and the slimy earth:
Roots of trees, and fear, and pain,
The blank of death, the pangs of birth,
An inhuman thing possess'd
By the throbbing of a drum:
And my lips were strange and numb,
But they kissed her white breast....
Then, being drunk with pride and splendour of love, I cried:

'"O spring of all delight, O moonèd mystery,
O living marvel, white as the dead queen of night,
O flower, and O flame ... tell me at least thy name
That, from this desolate height, I may proclaim its wonder
To the lost lands hereunder before thy beauty dies
As fades the fire of dawn upon a peak of snow!"'
Then: "Look," she sighed, "into my eyes, and thou shalt know."
So, with her fingers frail, she pressed my brows, and so,
Slowly, at last, she raised my drooping eyelids pale,
And in her eyes I gazed.
'Then fear, than love more blind,
Caught at my heart and fast in chains of horror bound--
As one who in profound and midnight forest ways
Sees in the dark the burning eyes of a tiger barred
Or stealthy footed pard blaze in a solemn hate
And lust of human blood, yet cannot cry, nor turning
Flee from the huddled wood, but stands and sees his fate,
Or one who in a black night, groping for his track,
Clings to the dizzy verge of a cragged precipice,
Shrinks from the dim abyss, yet dare not venture back,
And no sound hears but the hiss of empty air
Swirling past his ears.... So, in a hideous
Abandonment of hope, I waited for her kiss.
Then the restless beat of the muttering drum
Rose to a frenzied heat; the naked dancers leapt
Insolent through the flame, laughing as they came
With parted lips; their cries deadened my ears, my eyes
Throbbed with the pattering of their rapid feet,
And the whirling dust of their dancing swept
Into my throat unslaked, dry-parchèd with love's drought,
Until my mouth was pressed upon her burning mouth
In a kiss most terrible.... Oh, was it pride, or shame
Unending, without name, or ecstasy, or pain
Or desperate desire? Alas! I cannot tell,
Save that it pierced my trembling soul and body with fire.
For, while her soft lips clove to mine in love, she drove
A flaming blade of steel into my breast, and I,
Rent with a bitter cry, slid from her side and fell
Clutching in dumb despair the dark unbraided hair
My passion had despoiled; while she, like serpent coiled,

Poised for another stroke, terribly, slowly, smiled,
Saying: "O stranger, red, red are my lips, and sweet
Unto those lips so red are the kisses of the dead:
Far hast thou wandered, far, for the kisses of Thamar."
Then a deep silence fell on the frenzy and the laughter;
The leaping dancers crept to the shadows where they had slept,
And the mute eunuchs stood forth, and hugely bent
Above my body, spent in its pool of blood,
And hove me with black arms, while the queen followed after
With stealthy steps, and eyes that burned into the night
Of my dying brain, till, with her hand, she bade
Them falter, and they stayed, while, eagerly, she propped
My listless head that dropped downward from my shoulders,
And slowly raised it up, raised it like a cup
Unto her lips again,
Then shuddered, trembled, shrunk, as though her mouth had drunk
A potion where the fell fire of poison smoulders.
And a darkness came, and I could see no more,
But in my ears the roar of lonely torrents swelled
And stilled my breath for ever, as though a wave appalling
Had broken in my brain, and deep to deep were calling:
And I felt my body falling down and down and down
Into a blank of death, where dumb waters roll
Endlessly, only knowing, that her dagger had stabbed my breast,
But her kiss had killed my soul.
And now I know no rest until again I stand
Where that lost city's towers rise from the dreamy sand,
Until I reach the gate where the lips of Asia wait,
Till I cross the desert's drought, and the rivers of the south,
And shiver through the night under those summits white
That soar above Cathay; until I see the light
Flame from those tyrannous glooms where, like a tired star
In stormy darkness, looms the castle of Thamar.'

ENVOI

Now that the hour has come, and under the lonely
Darkness I stumble at the doors of death,
It is not hope, nor faith
That here my spirit sustaineth, but love only.

In visions, in love: only there have I clutched at divinity:
But the vision fadeth; yet love fades not: and for this
I would have you know that your kiss
Was more to me than all my hopes of infinity.

Therein you made me divine … you, who were moon and sun for me,
You, for whose beauty I would have forsaken the splendour of the stars
And my shadowy avatars
Renounced: for there is nothing in the world you have not done for me.

So that when at length all sentient skill hath forsaken me,
And the bright world beats vainly on my consciousness,
Your beauty shineth no less:
And even if I were dead I think your shadow would awaken me.

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